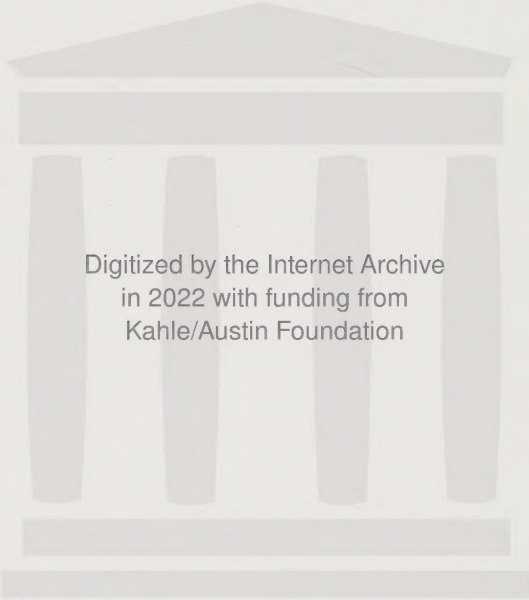


Kristin Abraham



Little Red Riding Hood Missed the Bus



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Little Red Riding Hood Missed the Bus



Subito Press is a nonprofit literary publisher based in the Creative Writing Program of the Department of English at the University of Colorado at Boulder. We look for innovative fiction and poetry that at once reflects and informs the contemporary human condition, and we promote new literary voices as well as work from previously published writers. Subito Press encourages and supports work that challenges already-accepted literary modes and devices.

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Fiction: Adam Peterson, *My Untimely Death*

Poetry: Kristin Abraham, *Little Red Riding Hood*
Missed the Bus

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Little Red Riding Hood
Missed the Bus

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Contents

Acknowledgments ix

Call Our Hands <i>the animals</i>	1
Things That Are Muffled Open	3
Little Red Riding Hood as a Rubber Ducky	4
Cure	5
Hunt	7
Little Red Riding Hood Hides Out	8
Gone before You Saw Nothing	9
Little Red Riding Hood Has a Headache	11
Break Mountain; or, Redheaded Stepchild	12
Narrative	14
Little Red Riding Hood Inside Out	16
Wind Her Up, Watch Her Go	17
Next	20
Little Red Riding Hood Missed the Bus	22
Fits, Starts, Etc.	23

Bog	25
Little Red Riding Hood through the Eye	28
Ethic	29
Little Red Riding Hood Is in the Airport; or, the Police Dogs Are on to Her	31
Little Red Riding Hood, Lips like Vinyl	33
Little Miss Skeleton in Her Closet	35
Dig	36

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Pacific Review: “Little Red Riding Hood through the Eye”

Rio: A Journal of the Arts: “Break Mountain or Redheaded Stepchild”

Spout: “Next”

Matt—

Mom and Dad—

(always)

Little Red Riding Hood Missed the Bus

Call Our Hands the animals

Something had burst:
the birds weren't singing.
The children (*we have nothing to do*)
had gathered them:

Lined them up
one by one,
tapping their
walnut heads

Until someone said
What does a gizzard look like?
Where is the wishbone?

They tackled it like that:
wing by wing until
their band-aids ripped loose:
little postcards of gauze—

And the hush at their feet
aimed itself upward,
like needles, troubled
pieces of silver.

Things That Are Muffled Open

We start off slow like this, red. Watch
the stones tipping off our shoes, the snow.
Each second small and aspirin-flavored,
the learning of childhood. *May I sit? May I
stand?* Look both ways, please & thank you.
(Curtsy to the crowd.) (Pause for applause.)
May I sit? The world is gathering itself up
to answer, making hesitant check-marks.
May I stand? Lists of hurt already long
enough. *Long enough*, the world begins,
begins a sigh. So we're looking at the
cracks in the lampshade. Looking for
the yellow to come through, where
there's biology: electricity: math, meaning
the more we touch it, the more it spreads.
Like menthol, heat rash. The louder it gets.
Stand back; I'm going to need that air.

Little Red Riding Hood as a Rubber Ducky

She came from a world where neglect was bad,
isolation and the wrong kind of color in her face;
now she's floating down the river to Grandma's

(Like Moses. Like Noah.

And when I grow up, I'm gonna love).

With two baskets. Two stiff, heavy wings.

Her yellow rain jacket snapped tight—

Then puncture and *hiss*,

running in her head,

two reds on the inside.

Cure

They played

doctor.

(She was foot of the bed / chart

marked with asterisks & daggers,

the story looking over its shoulder.)

Then the next *she*

was born, they

called her *Ridiculous*.

Ridiculous as

shh, I can hear them, as

little door in my mind

(the not-so-pleasant fairytale).

Now the family can't
sleep: birds
are living
in her walls, unraveling
the hem of her name.

Now she tosses crusts
to the birds, now the birds
won't leave.

Hunt

To get out
of his constant slice
this house needs windows

arrow

arrow

Little Red Riding Hood Hides Out

She arrives being brave—*I'm being very brave*—so much of the evidence has been burned. She arrives trying harder, having been balled up at the base of the bed, lying beyond easily. She's lost the ability to fly herself through, surrounded by physicians, or just one of them with one great light strapped to his head: "My dear, it seems that to say 'I' is an admission you don't want to make."

Gone before You Saw Nothing

If you want to pretend that you *are* her—

In the aftermath of summer,
in pulling up wet shingles,
shaking out the awnings:
her hand, her ring. Her ear.

Make it stop.

It wasn't the machine sounds;
it was almost inaudible anger
in the tiniest movements.
What she called a storm.

Make it stop.

The moon on her shoes,
her shoes on dark branches,

her body, the tree, balancing
sky and no sky.

Make it stop.

*Little Red Riding Hood Has
a Headache*

After the anesthesia

someone had pulled all the plastic
safety plugs from her sockets

stop rubbing your hurt against me

her throat tight

like after singing

but she didn't know how

(It began with a phrase

“everything cuts”

then that drilled-out-and-filled
ache.)

*Break Mountain;
or, Redheaded Stepchild*

Shards of a room

move the ocean in her throat:
the day is yellow. It is

always yellow. She nods
as if learning it.

*I said a lemon-shaped light and
you hit me—*

it was like you hit me.
A lemon-shaped light.

*

What you hold
you hold in your hand:

bone china, thick braided
roots of the house plant—

his hand is a shove.

You hear
her up the stairs,

bits of ice
on the river.

Narrative

She speaks into her hands,

brightens, pinks;

her lips touch and feint.

For the time being

was a glove, at least

shaped like a glove,

in which case what else—

It's not that she moves strangely

but it's the ways she

makes her movements strange:

points to the blue constant

vein in her wrist as she leans,
skin like cotton, stretching.

The sound is a patch of grass

(I want to be small

(I want to live inside of it

but the vein is a soft
tract, a slight blue, and
she begins there,
at the edge.

Little Red Riding Hood Inside Out

Something flared *pain* in her head.

It made sense like we all make sense.

It was a fur coat, smooth legs, a set of teeth:

something like

lipstick

something like

Braille

Snare drums behind the eyes.

Wind Her Up, Watch Her Go

She put her hands
edge-to-face:

fused fingers,
plastic smell

*Would like to have lived
in a hole
in a cinder block,
matted with straw.*

When she came in,
you smelled the cold on her.

You wanted to shake it off of her—

*The pain
could be worse,
we live
for desire—*

You shake her
till her eyes
flap, that little
plastic ball inside
rattles around.

She wants
you to
pull her hair.

*Wanted
to die, but didn't
know how.*

Now she is a rubber doll
and you're pushing
your hand in:
she is a toy wheezing
love me.

*Wish I were
stuck on a thorn,
a thread in the wind.*

She is
a pear-shaped
sound.

Next

You can't blame your brokenness

*I love eyes
and teeth and all
that tilt and hand*

Because this is
what you see

*Once you
had gotten
inside of me*

*sounds
that inside of me*

*dark
pinched with stars*

Because inside
tried and failed

*The snow
was steam
and making
a sound of
I don't know*

Little Red Riding Hood Missed the Bus

Somewhere they won't know
she got herself lost.

But she's folding paper sparrows
inside her head; she's trying confession:
Things moving. The corner of my eye.

The camera is above her;
the angle looks down on her small
red twirling. But sometimes
the camera is in her eyes. We see the
everywhere she looks—
face—

Now she can't even see the trees
for all the forests. Somewhere a log cabin,
a woodstove. The first fantasy was a mistake.
The second had a rag stuffed in its mouth.

Fits, Starts, Etc.

(It wasn't as simple as
wife kills husband with hatchet.)

Beginning, in Ohio, where
the farmland takes place

(*Great shot; now let's find your
bird*). Ending as a child

(*I don't know where this has
been*). Certain things we've done
since: sugar on the strawberries,
lemon juice on apple slices.

Inside somewhere, still, that

I'll glow when I want to.

(Tendency to burn, etc.)

She tried to not, but couldn't.

Bog

As for the snow,
it only seemed to matter
when it was there,
running interference
patterns between
psychic and *vision*.

*

Collar / Collarbone.

*

Inside the scrap of moss,
the woman looked like a
heart, a scar. Inside the
scrap of moss, the body
stayed preserved.

*

Sight and interference patterns.

Then: argument, jawbone.

Then: a bliss-shaped afterward.

*

Some of the long bones
had evidence of battle wounds,
and her ghost was shrinking.

*

A little piece of thick
in her mouth.

*

Her ghost was shrinking.

*I should have bitten him
with vigor, should have
felt the bad kind of anger,
like Christ's palms, up
or down.*

*

Evidence she might have bled,
like all of us bleed in our
own house. But the sight
showed something different:
it was *fear-birds* and *running*.

*

As for the snow, bleary.
You know the feeling,
ghost wrapped in oilcloth,
landslide in your mouth.

Little Red Riding Hood through the Eye

At fourteen, her freckles began to open
at night, shined like tiny miners' caps.
After that, she said, *pleasantly ruined*.
Not what he had said, not "spoiled" as in
"wrecked," not " ."

Inside her, the fetal bones thrummed
when she found the arrow in the coyote
skull, took it home, grit-in-her-teeth,
flint-scratched. The day after
she paused with her short glass of milk,
felt the edge like a shard: *This is a God test*.
So much it's like rocks in my mouth.
Then his flat palms, his cower, the arrow-twang.

(I think nothing else happened.)

(I think that's the worst.)

Ethic

First they studied

her long bones

*humerus, metacarpals,
femur, metatarsals*

Then they strained her

till she was white

They were looking

for the truth

But he had already confessed

forgive me Father

and it was curved anyway

pelvis, clavicle, rib

His whisper was ten

penance

“Hail Mary’s,” an

“Our Father,” a

“Hail Holy Queen”

His whisper was

a smell, like after the fire *awful normal*

Little Red Riding Hood
Is in the Airport; or, the Police Dogs
Are on to Her

(Not out of the blue:
right in the middle of it.)

She drags a soul in on its wheels.

You see, she ages in cat years,
so she knew what she was getting into.

But her heart is made of grass and twigs,
a little dab of yellow paint.

“That’s where the mice live,”
she whispers to the guards.

They smile at her
(like old people smile at her).

The flies get thicker.

“Of course, the mice
don’t show on the X-rays.”

And neither did the fear
or yesterday’s tiny foot
on his windpipe—

*Little Red Riding Hood,
Lips like Vinyl*

She knew aspirin institutions,
their relevant sounds, was nervous
and bitter from birth with
no evident cause. She had a secret
gash in her palm from holding on
to the edges of everything too long:
countertops, rims of glasses,
book bindings, frames. As accident
would have it, she let go for a while,
her guard down the way children's
guards go down in fairytales. She got
lost and torn in the forest, must have
run toward the hunter in flame orange
gear, realizing too late that he was gunning
her down. He listened to the rifle snap
and ratchet, then saw the residual haunt

of her, caustic like her body, back
and forth, grasping twigs and snapping
in her pointy boots and pearl buttons.

Little Miss Skeleton in Her Closet

Years later, in the town's only lake, the lantern's rays
sift the green water and slowly flicker at its own
farthest yellow arm, silt pieces clouding up,
falling into and out of the light, as if saying
follow me, here is where you'll find it,
trailing toward pitch and muck, the rusted-out
car gone over the bridge and its bride with the hole
in her head, veil trailing, fish-nibbled, into the gloam;
the golf balls shot from the banks, arrows zinged through
during carp season; old burlap filled with litters of puppy
and kitty bones; wagon wheels, deer antlers, rusted out
coffee pots. It was supposed to be content, how we always
thought of the lake, looking across the still surface, so close
to cracking, sick of playing pretend all the time in our heads.

Dig

*One choice is to
not talk, I say,
wonder what that
admits. Another
is to participate
in the myth-
making. Move
like tiny creatures
at the bottom of
the sea. After
which, freeze-*

dried, rasping,
stuck all over
with pins.

"In these remarkable and haunting poems, the figure of the child hovers between animal and human, between the socialized world of first persons and an other world, ephemeral, perhaps wild—the world of the tale. Here we sense not only the child's absolute vulnerability, but also her resistance, her refusal: 'My dear, it seems / that to say "I" is an admission / you don't want to make,' says one speaker to the child. The wolf is here, but as a threat that begins in the child because it is the threat of the adult world that harms by forcing the child to join: 'One choice is to / not talk,' writes Abraham, 'Another / is to participate / in the myth-making.' These poems participate, but by way of a careful and beautiful implosion." — **Julie Carr**

"Abraham is a poet who understands the virtue of cutting close to the bone, as well as the dangers inherent in such a practice. After all, she reminds us, 'the more we touch it, the more it spreads.' Here is a poet with 'two reds on the inside,' who is smart enough to recognize that in the slippery realm of feminine defiance, she's both the hunter and the hunted; and who possesses an abundance of wily talent, because in her hands the reader becomes that too." — **Louise Mathias**

Kristin Abraham is Assistant Professor of English at Ashford University. She is author of *Orange Reminds You of Listening*, and her work has appeared in such as *The Journal*, *Court Green*, *Dislocate*, and *Rattle*.

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